

9th June 1847.

I deem it also necessary to mention that those who have escaped from the fatal influence of disease are the least numerous of the Irish emigrants. (Circular Letter to the catholic Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland.)

I submit these facts to your consideration, that your Lordship may have every reason to be assured that your Lordship's noble and benevolent efforts will be successful in relieving the suffering and distressed emigrants, and in saving them from the fatal consequences of their situation. Quebec, the 9th June 1847.

MY LORD AND VENERABLE BROTHER,

The voice of religion and humanity imposes on me the sacred and imperative duty of exposing to Your Lordship the dismal fate that awaits thousands of the unfortunate children of Ireland who come to seek in Canada an asylum from the countless evils afflicting them in their native land.

Already a considerable number of vessels overloaded with emigrants from Ireland have arrived in the waters of the St. Lawrence. During the passage many of them weakened beforehand by misery and starvation, have contracted fatal diseases, and, for the greater part, have thus become the victims of an untimely death. This was but the very natural result of their precarious situation. Crowded in the hold of the vessels, unable to strictly adhere to the rules of cleanliness, breathing constantly a putrid atmosphere, and relying frequently for nourishment upon insufficient and very bad provisions, it was morally impossible to escape safe and sound from so many causes of destruction.

Anchoring at Grosse-Isle, about 30 miles below Quebec, where they are compelled to perform a quarantine, the transatlantic vessels were most commonly infected with sick and dying emigrants. Last week at that station were detained more than 2000 patients, of whom scarcely more than a half could find a shelter on the island. The others were left in the hold of their respective vessels, in some cases abandoned by their own friends, spreading contagion among the other healthy passengers who were confined in the vessels, and exhibiting the heartrending spectacle of a mortality three times greater than what prevailed ashore. Our provincial Government has undoubtedly manifested the greatest zeal and most parental anxiety in assisting the unhappy emigrants, but yet could not in due time employ the requisite precautions to meet their manifold wants: the consequence is, that vast numbers sighed and do still sigh in vain after the charitable care so necessary to the preservation of human life. Already more than a thousand human beings have been consigned to their final rest in the catholic cemetery, precursors of thousands of others who will rejoin them there, if the stream of emigration from Ireland continues to flow with the same abundance. One catholic clergyman alone in ordinary circumstances ministered to the spiritual wants of the Quarantine Station; but this year the services of even seven at a time have been indispensably required to afford to the dying emigrants the last rites and consolations of their cherished religion. Two of these gentlemen are actually lying on the bed of sickness, from the extreme fatigues they have undergone and the fever they have contracted, in visiting the infected vessels and the hospitals on the island, to accomplish thus the duties of their sacred ministry, and gladden the last moments of the Irish emigrant. The details we receive of the scenes of horror and desolation of which the chaplains are daily and ocular witnesses, almost stagger belief and baffle description; most despairingly and immensably do they affect us, as the available means are totally inadequate to apply an effectual remedy to such awful calamities. Many of the more fortunate emigrants who escape from Grosse-Isle in good health, pay tribute to the prevailing diseases either at Quebec or Montreal, and overcrowd the hospitals of these two cities, where temporary buildings are erected for the reception of a greater number, without still affording sufficient accommodation. Amid the present confusion, we have had neither leisure nor opportunity to ascertain the number of orphans and families that are thrown for support on public charity.

I deem it also necessary to mention that those who have escaped from the fatal influence of disease, are far from realizing on their arrival here, the ardent hopes they so fondly cherished of meeting with unspeakable comfort and prosperity on the banks of the St. Lawrence. To attain so desirable an end, they should possess means which the greater number have not, and which cannot be rendered available and efficacious, unless emigration be conducted on a more diminished scale.

I submit these facts to your consideration, that your Lordship may use every endeavour to dissuade your diocesans from emigrating in such numbers to Canada, where they will but too often meet with either a premature death, or a fate as deplorable as the heartrending condition under which they groan in their unhappy country. Your Lordship will thus open their eyes to their true interests, and prevent the honest, religious and confiding Irish peasantry from being the victims of speculation, and falling into irretrievable errors and irreparable calamities.

I have the honor to remain,

My Lord and venerable brother,

With sentiments of profound respect,

Your most humble and obedient servant,

† JOS. SIGNAY,
Archbishop of Quebec.